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# 'Self' and 'Other' in Non-Dualistic Vedānta: A Moral Interpretation

## Abstract

The article examines the metaphysical and ethical approaches appropriate to studying the image of the self and other in Non-Dualistic Vedānta (hereafter *NDV*). *NDV* examines the nature of the empirical division of the *self* and the *other*, referred to by the terms 'I' and 'you' - *asmad* and *yuṣmad*, respectively. Behind the mundane expressions of these terms, Śaṅkara identifies 'superimposition' as a metaphysical precursor, which generates a cognitive error in all such expressions using personal pronouns and the use of predicates thereupon. The prime intent of the paper is to demonstrate vis-à-vis the metaphysical framework of *NDV* that the distinction of *self* and *other* is founded upon ignorance. If this ignorance is replaced by true knowledge, the entire problems pertaining to 'self' and 'other' will see the development of a different kind of understanding, exposing the underlying unity of self and other, which generates a different attitude. Taking recourse to the *NDV*'s exposition of the issue, a moral interpretation of the underlying unity of self and other is also intended.

## 1. Introduction

Non-Dualistic Vedānta is one of the most prominent schools of Indian philosophical systems. Śaṅkara, its main proponent, begins his philosophical analysis with a commentary on *Brahma Sūtra*, by examining the nature of the empirical division of the *self* and the *other*, which are referred by the terms 'I' and 'You' - *asmad* and *yuṣmad*, respectively. The distinction between *self* and *other* is the product of 'superimposition'<sup>1</sup> that generates a cognitive error, giving rise to expressions using personal pronouns and the use of predicates thereupon. One uses the first person pronoun 'I' for self and 'you' for others who are never recognized as connected with 'my [me]',<sup>2</sup> either epistemologically, or metaphysically. This unexamined distinction is caused by a fundamental ignorance – *avidyā*, which further causes various sets of expressions and behavioural patterns, such as 'I am fat', 'I am tall', etc. The fundamental ignorance is regarded as beginningless (*anādi*), endless (*ananta*) and natural (*naisargika*).

Ignorance gives rise to superimposition. This superimposition is defined as attributing the property of one thing to another (Śaṅkara, 1890: 108). *Self* (ultimate reality) when confused with something other than itself, i.e., object like mind, senses and body, gives rise to expressions like 'I am this (the body)', 'this is mine,' 'I am fat', 'I am thin' etc. The *Self* is therefore mistakenly identified with mind, senses and body. Actually, the *Self* is different from the not-self in as much as the light is different from the darkness. In the first passage of the *Brahma Sūtra Bhaṅya*, Śaṅkara states;

Yusmadasmatpratrayagocarayoh viṅaya-viṅayinoṅ tamaṅprakashavadviruddha svabhavayoh itaretarabhāvanupapattau siddhayām, taddharmanamapi sūtaram itaretarabhāvanupapattiṅ (Śaṅkaračārya, 1911: 1-1-1).

1 Superimposition is the wrong attribution of the properties of one thing on another. It is an error founded on non-apprehension of the difference of that which is superimposed from that on which it is superimposed.

2 Here, 'I' is the ātman, the universal self which pervades constantly in all the individual selves.

The 'subject'<sup>3</sup> and 'object' are absolutely dissimilar, and by nature are mutually opposed to each other and thus cannot be mutually superimposed. It is natural on the part of human beings to superimpose the 'object' on the 'subject' which are absolutely different from each other and incapable of being identified, i.e., of being taken one as the other. From this writing of Śāṅkara two points are clear:

1. There is dissimilarity between Subject and Object
2. Reciprocal superimposition is an impossibility.

The *Self* whose essential nature is pure consciousness - is attributed less, devoid of any type of activity and difference. However, when the objects like mind-senses and body are attributed to the *Self*, then the *Self* becomes individual self<sup>4</sup> - the agent, and enjoyer of all the activities. Mind-senses and the body is the product of ignorance and have no reality of their own. These are regarded as unreal, opposed to the real (Śāṅkaraċārya, 1911: Introduction). The real is that which is uncontradicted (Dasgupta 2006: 444). Now, the mind-senses and body perish at the time of death.<sup>5</sup> So, they cannot be regarded as real. Therefore, they are unreal, i.e., false (*mithyā*) and are attributed to the *Self*. The absence of the discrimination between subject and object, which are opposed to each other, gives rise to identification of the *Self* with the body in the form of expressions like 'I am fat'.

Similarly, identification with the mind gives rise to expressions like 'I am happy', 'I am sad', and identification with the senses gives rise to expressions like 'I am deaf', 'I am dumb' and so on. The identification of the *Self* with attributes other than the *Self* is erroneous (Robbiano & Chiara, 2016: 138-142). Since the *Self* is beyond these qualities. *Self* is pure consciousness and cannot be lean, fair, happy, sad, etc., because these are the states or conditions of the body. *Self* under ignorance gets limited by attributes (mind-senses and body) of not-self,<sup>6</sup> which gives rise to the notion of the individual self or *jīva*.

However, there is plurality of mind, senses and body. Two individuals differ not on account of consciousness in them, but on account of the mind-body complex which qualifies consciousness (Indich, 2000: 51). One and the same consciousness appears to be plural because of the plurality of adjuncts. Individual self projects the notion of self and other while in reality there is no duality. In order to show the reality of the *Self* and unreality of the object, the *NDV* formulates a criterion of the real in the following way.

- 3 The subject is pure consciousness. The pure consciousness conditioned by ignorance is the individual consciousness. If it is merely a passive observer or indifferent to the perceived object, it is called the witness-consciousness (*sākṣī-Caitanya*), and if it is actively involved with the object, it is called engaged-consciousness, the subject (*jīva-caitanya*). Both are essentially pure consciousness. However, when they operate under the spell of ignorance, they become individual consciousness.
- 4 *Self* in non-dualistic Vedānta is the witness consciousness. The pure consciousness, on account of its association with the ignorance becomes the witness of the perceived objects. This witness consciousness when, gets limited by mind-senses and body, it becomes the individual self. In this paper, *Self* (with capital 'S') is taken as Pure consciousness or *Brahman*. *Self* (with small 'S') is the individual self; the agent and enjoyer of the fruits of action. The difference between *Self* and individual self is that the *Self* is devoid of any type of activity, but individual self performs actions and is limited.
- 5 The Body is reduced to ashes, but there is no destruction of the *Self*, because the *Self* has the nature of being always in the existence, i.e., being eternal. (Śāṅkaracharya, 1890: 2-3-7)
- 6 Not-self is opposed to real, i.e., unreal. It is exactly the case of silver-shell illusion, where a person observes the properties of silver in the shell for a particular period of time. When this illusion gets over, he realizes that it was an error; the silver was unreal. Similarly, the not-self like mind-senses and body are attributed to the *Self*, on account of which the conception of individual self takes place. In reality the conception of an individual being as, such and such, is erroneous and this error gets corrected after realization of the non-difference between the *Self* i.e., ātman and *Brahman*. (Śāṅkaracharya, 1921: 52)

The real is that which can never be contradicted and is uniformly present in all our experience across time (*trikāla abādhita*). Individual *jīva* has three states of experience – wake, dream and deep sleep. In the waking state, the individual self is conscious and encounters objects of the external world through the functioning of the mind and senses. In the dream state, mind alone functions and projects the objects of its own. Furthermore, the deep sleep state is bereft of the functioning of the mind and sense organs, and thus there remains no awareness of the objects. Thus, it demonstrates that during waking, dreaming and deep sleep state, the mind and senses are sometimes present and sometimes absent. However, the *Self* remains uniformly present in all the states of experience. With this it is evident that the *Self* alone is real while all other attributes have no reality of their own (Balasubramanian, 1989: 32-37).

*Self* is restricted by limiting adjuncts and becomes finite. Adjunct is defined as that “which standing near (*upa*) anything, imparts (*adhadati*) to it, it’s (the appearance of) own qualities” (Kazemi, 2006: 6). The result of this superimposition is that the individual thinks itself to be limited in knowledge, power and in other aspects. The individual performs actions; becomes subject to pain, pleasure and is caught up in transmigratory existence. An individual considers himself as a son, a father, a husband, a great businessman, etc. All these identifications are based upon a false conception of the self, woven by ignorance. Again, all the worldly transactions based on the sense of difference and duality between self and other (born out of ignorance) lead to serious consequences in society. The difference when used to discriminate oneself or one’s group from all ‘others’ leads to perplexing evils, of the present time such as communal tension, violence against women, corruption, etc. The focus of this paper is to reveal the fact that in the context of NDV, the difference has no ontological existence of its own. All existing beings have one ontological ground,<sup>7</sup> i.e., Consciousness or *Self*. If this concept is comprehended properly, it leads to greater social harmony. The duality is based on erroneous constructs and needs to be abandoned with the assistance of knowledge.

## 2. Superimposition and prevailing misconceptions

Superimposition is an apparent presentation of the attributes of one thing in another. Everything in the world is brought into existence on account of superimposition. Śāṅkara’s three main presuppositions that *Brahman* is the sole reality, the world is false and individual self is none other than *Brahman*, have led to two major misunderstandings about NDV, viz. 1) If the world is false, then the world would be non-existent. This will turn this world into a fancy or imagination (Singh, 1989: 75-80). 2) If the world has an illusory existence, the ethics or morality would become meaningless.

Against the first misunderstanding, it is contended that the fancy or imagination implies that the object perceived is a projection of the mind. Conversely, Śāṅkara never admits that the world is projected by the mind (Śāṅkaracharya, 1965: 400-405). The mind may know the world but does not constitute it or determine its nature. The system of NDV advocates empirical realism, i.e., the view that whatever is perceived exists independent of the perceiving mind. The object perceived by a perceiver must be granted some reality, for what is totally non-existent like “hare’s horn” can never be perceived by anyone at any time. On the other hand, the world is perceived, experienced and most importantly, this world is commonly shared by selves. Therefore, the world can never be regarded as the product of

<sup>7</sup> In this context, ground and the reality are used synonymously. This can be made clear with an example of clay and pot. Clay is the substratum out of which all the pots are made since all the earthen pots are made of clay. Moreover, we can mould clay into pots, plates, jugs, etc and call them by different names. Despite this, it cannot be admitted that these utensils are nothing but clay. (This clay-pot analogy is used to reveal the non-difference between *Brahman* and all the *jīvas*). Similarly, *Brahman* is the basis of whole existence, which is both the material and efficient cause of this world. This establishes the non-duality of *Brahman* with the cognized world. Therefore, real and the cognized ground is non-different.

imagination through a cognizing mind.

The second misunderstanding regarding the meaninglessness of ethics and morality is further amplified by asserting that there cannot be a real distinction between good and bad, right and wrong if the world is a mere illusion. On the contrary, these distinctions are pivotal for moral discourse. Suppose, this world is illusory, which will imply that the social and moral obligations are also merely the product of illusion. Consecutively, no one should walk on the path of truthfulness, since truth and falsity are nothing but illusions (Ranade, 1970: 146). The falsity of the world, thus would destroy the foundation of morality. It leads to the view that NDV cannot uphold ethical discourse in its framework.

These prevailing views rest on mistaken proposition.<sup>8</sup> It is not logically possible for an individual self to be conscious of itself as illusory. In the same manner, the world of our experience in which, all our actions take place, perceptions are shared cannot be regarded as illusory. "Just as it is not possible for me to realize that 'I do not exist,' likewise it is not possible for me to realize that 'I am illusory'" (Sen, 1989: 72-74). The world according to NDV has *Brahman* as its substratum.<sup>9</sup> *Brahman* is the ground and the world is grounded. In order to defend the system Radhakrishnan argues that:

The inference of the unreality of the world from its sole reality of Brahman is legitimate, if the world is viewed as separate from *Brahman*. But is there any ground for such assumption? ...The reality of the Brahman everywhere asserted in the Upanisads, instead of implying the unreality of the world, logically involves its reality (Braue, 1984: 20-28).

All the misconceptions about NDV are based on an initial misreading that *Brahman* and the world are two numerically different entities. In the classic example of snake in the rope illusion, the snake is being perceived but not without a ground or substratum, i.e., rope. We consider snake as illusory, but it is not altogether non-existent, (like the hare's horn, which has no substratum). The perception of snake is made possible by a really existent substratum – rope. So, whenever there is the perception or experience of something, the experience is possible only because there is some underlying reality (Śāṅkaraċārya, 1965: 394-400). Similarly, the world and all the experiences undertaken in the world cannot be illusory. Since, *Brahman* is the ground upon which the world of phenomena is projected. All other existence depends upon *Brahman* for its reality and being. *Brahman* appearing as the world is analogous to the rope mistakenly perceived as a snake. The snake can never be perceived if there was no underlying reality of rope and can only last until the rope is not perceived, which is its essential nature.

Similarly, the existence of the world cannot be denied. The experience of the world stands affirmed. Śāṅkara assigns empirical reality to the world. Of course, there are some passages in his writings that might imprecisely suggest that the world of experience, action and morality is illusory. For instance, Śāṅkara uses the term '*mithyātva*' (false) for the world and all empirical reality. But here, the term '*mithyā*' is best understood in terms of 'distinct from real and unreal both' (*sadasat vilakṣaṅtvaṅ mithyātvaṅ*). '*Mithyā*' commonly referred to the

8 The proposition like *Brahman* is real and the world is false (*Brahman satyam, Jagan mithyā jīvo Brahmaiva Naprañ*).

9 Śāṅkara repeatedly asserts that *Brahman* is the ground, (*adhishthāna*), Efficient cause (*kāraṇa*), Material cause (*Upādāna*), support (*āspada*) of the world appearance. All these expressions are used to reveal the oneness of the world with Brahman (*Brahmaiva idaṅ viśvam*). The finite multiplicity of the world is ontologically non-different from the Absolute. Their finitude and multiplicity consists in the names and forms which is being superimposed on the Self-absolute. An individual self and its multiple world differ only in name and form from *Self* and does not have its own ontological status. Ontologically the undivided unity of Self remains unimpaired by the multiplicity of sublatable names and forms.

world, is popularly translated as false, but it is neither totally unreal, like “hare’s horn” (since the world is experienced) nor it is ultimately real as Brahman (the world gets sublated after realization of the *Self*). The world has the status of empirical reality, which is an ontological category in the schema of NDV.

In Śaṅkara’s schema of interpretation, there are three levels of reality; *pāramārthika* or transcendental reality, *vyāvahārika* or empirical reality and *prātibhāsika* or illusory reality. The *Brahman* belongs to the *pāramārthika*, the world of space-time-causality belongs to *vyāvahārika*, while imagining the objects like silver in the shell, snake in the rope, are at the *prātibhāsika* level. Śaṅkara admits that the world is as real as anything possibly is, from the empirical level of reality (Śaṅkaračārya, 1965: 2-1-4). It is undoubtedly true that the main presupposition that *Brahman* is real, the world is false and the individual self is no other than the universal soul (*Brahman Satyam, jaganmithyā, jīvo Brahmaiva nāparaña*), (Śaṅkaračārya, 1921: Introduction) is found in the writings of Śaṅkara. This assertion indicates that the plurality of the world is false or unreal because it disappears in that moment when the effect of ignorance disappears. Thus, the world is unreal, only from a transcendental point of view. The world is regarded as real (empirically) because it is being experienced, and notably *Brahman* is the substrate or ground on which this world of plurality appears. Thus, the world is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal, but it is relatively ‘real’. The world is real in relation to the *Brahman* and apart from *Brahman* world can have no existence (Śaṅkaračārya, 1921: 102-104). Moreover, prior to the realization of *Brahman* all the transactions of the phenomenal world are real enough. This interpretation of Śaṅkara in the *Brahmasūtra Bhaṅya*, is also strengthened by the observation of G.N Jha, as stated below:

“All worldly activities are practically real until oneness with the *Brahman* has been realized; just as all dream activity is real so long as the dream lasts. So long as the true unity of the self has not been realized, it is not the right way for anyone to regard as unreal all worldly activities based upon the notion of means of cognition, objects of cognition and results of cognition and such other things. Consequently, prior to the realization of *Brahman* all worldly activities, as also the activities based upon the Vedic injunctions are quite justified.” (Sharma, 1960: 259).

Śaṅkara emphasizes that from the empirical standpoint, all the experiences, including, identity of the *Self* with body and creation of ‘other’ and the behaviours resulting from the creation of these images (self and other) cannot be denied. In addition to this, the difference between the self and other (along with immoral or unethical actions) based upon the sense of duality withers away, through the realization of non-duality (Sharma, 1960: 105-117).

### 3. The Problem of Enworlded Subjectivity

The basic problem with which the system of NDV is connected is the problem of ‘enworlded subjectivity.’ Consciousness and the object presented to consciousness are two different entities. The objects (mind-senses and body) are material and inert while the Consciousness is ever-luminous and pure.<sup>10</sup> But when the consciousness gets engaged in the objects of the world and does not realize its essence as *Real* then the problem of enworlded subjectivity arises. The distinction between consciousness and the world of objects presented to consciousness shows that the objects presented to consciousness are ‘transcendent’. No one can perceive consciousness as an object. One can only notice changes in the objects of consciousness but never in consciousness itself. The object which is unconscious can

10 Consciousness, in this context is one and ultimate underlying all the individual selves. Consciousness is the ultimate reality, unborn, uncreated, undying and hence immortal while the objects are psycho-physical composite. Sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings emotions, etc, are all objects of consciousness. They constantly arise and pass away, but consciousness remains the same.

never be designated as *Self* (Puligandla, 2004: 148).<sup>11</sup> But individual self regards the objects like mind, senses and body as conscious. Since, it is the mind which thinks, it is the body which feels and acts; the individual under ignorance thinks mind and body as conscious. Superimposition of the psycho-physical makeup on the consciousness leads to false identity of the *Self* with the objects giving rise to day-to-day activities. All our worldly transactions comprising activities both conative and affective (*lokavyavahāra*), rests on the distinction between subject and object.

Individual self cannot be the owner of anything that is transcendent to it, be it mind, sense organs, the body or any external object outside one's mind, senses and body (Balasubramanian, 1992: 77-93). The nature of the *self* or consciousness is such that being the principle of awareness in human knowledge and experience, it remains untouched and unaffected by all that is known or experienced. All the experienced objects cannot belong to the *Self* or can affect it. This means characterizing anything to the *Self* is logically impossible, because all that we know, think and speak of cannot be about the *Self*. It reveals the fact that conception of self taken in our normal activities is always predicated. Again, the other is always seen along with predications (mind, senses and body), while NDV establishes that the *Self* (pure consciousness) is beyond all the predications and is to be realized as one and non-plural. This realization of the *Self* (*Self* is without predications) leads to identification of one's self as not different from another, i.e., self-in-other and other-in-self (Sarukkai, 1997: 1408).

#### 4. The Higher Identity: Ground for Oneness

The predications to the *Self* result in distinction and separation from other selves. They give rise to particular attitude or behaviour towards others, which is the root of all misery and suffering. In NDV, metaphysical ignorance<sup>12</sup> occupies a significant position. It is only because of ignorance that the cycle of birth, death, pain and pleasure are associated with the individual self. Individual self without knowing its essential nature gets involved in the affairs of the world and perform actions. The results of actions lead to future life involving pain and pleasure. Moreover, it is on account of these painful experiences in the life-world that self experiences bondage. This bondage generates an inner urge to *know the Real* and attain liberation. NDV advocates that in yearning for liberation (*mumukñā*) from suffering, one realizes that the cause of the suffering is ignorance about the real nature of the self. When everything is *Self* and all the predications to the *Self* rests upon a mistake, then such a mistaken thinking leads to recognizing the reality of the other as different from the self. There occurs discrimination between self and other due to this mistaken recognition<sup>13</sup> between self and other which leads to consequences which are not good for the individual and the society as a whole.

One of the causes of social problems is the personal ego or *ahañkāra*. Sibajiban Bhattacharya defines the function of ego as "Ego is the 'I' consciousness, owner of all mental states and acts of the individual, restricts a person and separates him from other persons and the

11 According to NDV, Mind is not consciousness, but a subtle sense organ; it is an information-processing instrument. In other words, mind is a phenomenon, while consciousness is not a phenomenon. Mind is not a box containing thought, rather mind is no more and no less than thoughts arising and passing away. Similarly, senses and body are not consciousness per se. For instance, in state of deep sleep there is no realization of the body and senses.

12 Superimposition of the self on the not-self and the worldly activities (individual self considers himself as hale and hearty if his wife and son are hale and hearty) resulting from this imposition is the epistemological ignorance. Metaphysical ignorance, on the other hand is not realizing one's self as the pure consciousness.

13 Discrimination is unfair and unequal treatment of a person based on some personal characteristics like gender, race, caste etc.

objects of the world, is the centre around which all thoughts and actions revolves, usurps all the functions of pure consciousness as the foundation of a person, is the principle of identity and identifies itself with the mind-body complex." (Bhattacharya, 1992: 44-76). Ego is the major vehicle which carries all the activities. Ego is hardly perceived, although its presence is felt through actions it prompts. It expresses itself as "I" or "mine" and the idea of the self-identity distinct from other is created. This ego serves as the foundation for other identities, like those of family, religion, nationality, etc. (Rao, 2012: 202). Ego is the product of ignorance, i.e. not realizing that I am pure consciousness. Thus, there cannot be self-knowledge once the ego is left to its ignorant ways. Consequently, ego sometimes identifies itself as 'I am beautiful', and sometimes as 'I am powerful' or 'I am wealthy', etc. Each of these identifications becomes a link of a chain binding the ego to this relative existence, and thus the vision of identity with the other (and the *Self* at large) remains far-fetched.

Ego constantly strives to be right (never wrong), always superior (never inferior). It constantly seeks self-importance, power and superiority over others, often at any cost, and regardless of who they are affecting or hurting at the same time. The root of all conflicts in the society is ego or image of the self constructed under ignorance. All activities in the world are associated with self and other, so the distinction between them plays an important role. If this distinction is not handled properly, it may lead to chaos in the society. NDV goes beyond this distinction by teaching the oneness of all selves. The oneness of all implies absence of the 'other'.<sup>14</sup> The absence of the other does not establish elimination of the other, rather the absence of distinction between one and another. Thus, once the distinction between self and other is removed the treating of 'other' in an undesirable way is also obliterated. The removal of predicates of the self leads to identification of one's self with other. When we consider other as different from us, we do not bother about any harm caused to the other, by our actions, but on the other hand, if we have some concern for other, we think hundred times before harming other. It is because we are looking upon the other person as not 'other' anymore. Rather, we are treating him as an extension of ourselves (Rao, 2012: 202-206). It is natural to preserve one's own identity and existence. However, in its course, one may behave and act inappropriately for self subsistence. This many a times cause harm to the other. In sharp contrast, once the self has recognized its unity and non-difference with the other, it functions in an amicable fashion. This sense of 'oneness of all' brings transformation in the attitude of individual self, which further lead towards an ideal, peaceful and just society.

Śaṅkara teaches absolute oneness of all the beings. Recognition and realization of absolute oneness bring compassionate attitude, which impregnates the self in sharing suffering and joy, i.e., a spontaneous attempt to remove other's suffering and rejoicing their happiness. An enlightened being – *jīvanmukta*, a person liberated while living has experience of oneness of the self and absolute. He became the boundless ocean of love and compassion. Prior to the realization of the individual self as the *Self*, he lives and acts as an isolated agent. All his actions are directed towards self-interest, but after the rise of knowledge of the *Self*, he lives and acts in oneness with the *Self*. He feels the interest of all living beings as his own and in this sense he may be said to enter into all things - "the wise who have control over their passion, find the all-pervading everywhere and enter into all things" (Datta, 1988: 532).  
Deutsch comments:

The quality then that ought to inform human action is non-egoism, which, positively expressed, is what the Advaitin understands to be 'love'. One must interrelate

14 Śaṅkara, in his commentary on Kathopniñad states; '*Neha nānāsti Kiñcana*', which means that there is an absence of duality (Śaṅkara, 2015: 60-68). Similarly, the statement '*Tat tvam asi*' states the oneness of all the individual selves. (Śaṅkaračārya. 2001: 255)

with 'others', one must conduct oneself, with the knowledge that the other is non-different from oneself. Love, the meeting of another in the depth of being, must be grounded in knowledge, and when it is so grounded, it expresses itself in every action that one performs (Chiara, 2016: 138-142).

It is knowledge of non-difference that is the motivation behind the performance of actions directed towards the welfare of all. In morality, individual is enjoined to cultivate the spirit of non-difference and the teaching of Śāṅkara exposes the non-difference between *Brahman* (cause) and all the Individual selves (effects) (Śāṅkaračārya, 1965: 2-1-14). The Individual selves are non-different from *Brahman*, i.e., individuals have one essential ground. Furthermore, each individual self is not only a manifestation of the ultimate Self but is also non-different from the other. Manifestations are psycho-physical entities and thus have an illusory variance from one another. On the other hand, the non-difference of selves is a metaphysical truth. This metaphysical monism directs the self to engage himself in the ethics of active love, brotherhood and peaceful co-habitation. On enlightenment, unity of *Brahman* in all things, the sense of boundless equality becomes manifested. As Swami Nikhilananda holds, "Seeing all beings in himself and himself in all beings, the sage treats others as if they were his own self. Seeing God in all and all in God, he cannot but show respect and reverence to every being in the universe." (Goodwin, 1955: 321-344).

One who has understood and experienced the higher identity - oneness of all beings, is beyond the distinction of good and bad and thus free from sin. It simply means that the realized self has surpassed the realm of duality and has got a new vision to see the life and world. With this, the moral distinction of good and bad is no more significant or relevant to the enlightened. Thus, he develops a new vision of integrity with all beings and this vision is full of a compassionate attitude towards all selves. This forms a new moral perspective. The concept of good and bad presuppose self or ego – Good actions are directed towards the welfare of one's self and evil actions interfere with the well-being of the others. The essence of evil action lies in postulation of the self or ego, but when the error of the postulation is removed then the sense of non-difference among all the individual selves supervenes (Radhakrishnan, 1959: 102-105). Identification of self with the other, by the enlightened mind removes the possibility of inappropriate actions towards the other. Thus, the sense of oneness in NDV becomes the basis of morality.

Certainly, the distinction of good and bad forms the basis for ethical discourses. But, there is a unique and exclusive schema of ethical discourse in NDV, which lies not in difference, but in the identity of the selves. The sense of oneness is revealed in one of the great statements (*mahāvākya*) as asserted in the Upāṇiñads, *Tat tvam asi* (That thou art).<sup>15</sup> The intention of the statement is to indicate that the individual self 'thou' limited by the adjuncts is no other than the absolute, which is referred to as 'That.' The identity is obtained by discovering the integral meaning of apparently incompatible and contradictory terms<sup>16</sup> 'That' and 'thou' and thereby arriving at their common ground, i.e., consciousness. If the individual self is regarded as 'thou' and the absolute *Self* is taken as 'That' then it would be

15 *That thou art* is a *mahāvākya* (great statement) used in sixth chapter of Chāndogya upāṇiñad; Udalaka, teaches his son Śvetaketu about the nature of *Self*. The statement implies the non-difference between the essential nature of soul which is consciousness and the essential nature of God which too is consciousness. The aim of this statement is to remove the ignorance about self, as the self is veiled (*āvaranaśakti*) by the limiting adjuncts of not-self, i.e., the mind, senses and body, these compound of relativities is falsely regarded as "myself"; then this compound is imposed on the self, so that the unique and universal subject is falsely regarded as having the objective characteristics of a particular individual. The *mahāvākya* affirming the true nature of the self, by dispelling this superimposition of the differentiation born of ignorance, awakens the *jīva* to his true identity as the self being *Brahman*. *ĥtman* is unborn uncreated, undying and eternal, it is pure, objectless consciousness not to be identified with empirical ego.

16 They are contradictory in the sense that 'Thou' is the individual selves with limitation while 'That' is the infinite, all pervading consciousness.



difficult to maintain their identity as their nature is different. But there is 'secondary sense' of the sentence, 'That' and 'thou' that reveals the integral meaning of the terms. Secondary sense discloses that if 'thou' refers to pure consciousness underlying the individuals and 'that' denotes pure consciousness which is the essential nature of reality, then the identity between them emerges. The pure identity of 'That' and 'thou' is the essential nature of all existent beings in the world.<sup>17</sup> When self (thou) is known, all is known. Identity with all that is existing is the highest state of the self.

It is rightly said in *Bhagavadgītā* that "He who knows himself in everything and everything in himself will not injure himself by himself." (Radhakrishnan, 1959: 100-102). Therefore, the great statement *Tat tvam asi* manifests a precious concept which tends to collapse the subject-object distinction, leading to love and sympathy that is the cornerstone of morality. Some critics may hold that concept of ego or individuality and its difference from other is the root of ethics. It cannot be denied that all the moral questions are relevant only when there is individual self. Applying the notion of oneness found in NDV, one cannot be truly ethical as long as the ego subsides in the self. The essential difference of the individual is antagonistic to the morality. Oneness of self is the root of ethics, i.e., negation of one's own individuality (Elayath, 1989: 293-296). This is the reason that *Self* is defined in terms of 'not this'. An entity in the existing world can be defined in terms of genus, action, quality and relation. But the *Self* transcends these categories, i.e., it does not belong to any genus, performs no action, has no quality and cannot be said to be related to "another" apart from itself. For our day-to-day beliefs the *Self* is understood with the concept of name, form, action, etc. But from the ultimate standpoint, the *Self* cannot be described by any means whatsoever. All the qualifications to the *Self* are mistaken. Thus the prime purpose of negation is to eliminate those attributes that have been superimposed on the *Self* and on account of which the notion of individual self or 'ego' is created. Negation is a denial of the duality and difference that is experienced by individual self in the empirical existence. Therefore, identity is directly seen which is all the while prevented because of self's imperfect or wrong knowledge about it.

The great statement *Tat tvam asi* also intends to show that the difference between the reality that is understood by the term 'thou' and the reality indicated by the term 'That' is not there in fact. The statement can have far reaching influence on the social make-up only if it is not kept confined to the conceptual thought alone, but is exhibited in actions as well. A person who is able to look upon all beings as non-different from himself will be free from vices such as greed, hatred, jealousy, etc. All immoral behaviour is directed towards 'others'. No one cheats or harm himself. He will perform it on others. No one is also ever jealous of himself; it is possible to feel jealously only towards others. No one ever steals his own purse. One can only steal someone's purse.

Thus, it is evident from the above analogies that all immoral and harmful behaviour is directed towards other. It is aimed at others because others are looked upon mistakenly as others and thus are completely different from our self. On realization of non-difference, the individual looks upon everything as the self. This individual self by his very nature will be abiding moral codes and will behave in a harmless manner. A person realizing the identity of all beings will be free from the selfish interest as he will not be inclined towards harming 'other'. Such a person does not have an ego that prompts him to do evil and behave in self-interest so as to create hurdles for others. Love, compassion, non-violence, etc. will be the qualities of the realized self and such qualities will build a peaceful society.

17 Once the identity is established the world and its objects exists but without the trace of *avidyā*. The world does not get dissolve only the *avidyā* gets removed. Moreover, *avidyā* is not the basis of all the existent entities of the world. *Avidyā* is the basis of all the distinctions only. When *avidyā* is removed all the attributes to the self, which is the cause of distinction and suffering is removed.

For moral actions, difference is only an occasion and if it were absolute, moral actions would have been impossible. Moral actions can be seriously taken, on account of the melting away of difference. That is why Śaṅkara regards identity as ultimately real and difference as only empirically real. The knowledge of the "Real" (*Self*) is regarded as the highest good for mankind. It is not mere intellectual knowledge but experience of the *Self* which can be acquired only after the performance of moral actions, according to Śaṅkara.<sup>18</sup> This experience of the *Self* cannot take place unless the mind is purified of the evil thoughts and selfish activities. Purification of mind (*citta-suddhi*) is necessarily required for attaining liberation, as the mind is said to be the cause of bondage and its purification results in emancipation. If the mind is filled with the impurities of anger, selfishness, etc., it causes bondage. When the same mind is purified through the performance of ethical actions like sacrifices, penances, sincerity, truthfulness and charity etc., it gets rid of all impure tendencies and is ready to attain the knowledge of the *Self*. Thus, utmost importance is given to moral discipline. Ethics or morality is mostly understood in this tradition in the context of liberation (Jhingran, 1999: 131). It is unanimously believed that a high level of self-discipline and purity of heart are pre requisites for even undertaking the quest for liberation. Purification of mind and the self is attained through the performance of various ethical and religious activities.

Furthermore, in his commentary on *Bhagavadgītā*, Śaṅkara says that working for the welfare of others itself is *ahimsa* (non-violence) (Jhingran, 1999: 131). Various virtues are emphasized to be cultivated; an individual self who is desirous of liberation must cultivate the virtues like absence of anger, non-injury, peace, self-control, celibacy, cleanliness of body and mind, truthfulness, sincerity, absence of jealousy, self-abnegation, kindness, softness, patience, modesty, forgiveness, austerities, withdrawal of senses from their objects and renunciation of all possessions (Surama, 1994: 115). These virtues create transformation in the behaviour of the seeker leading to the highest Good and also proves instrumental for conflict-free society.

## 5. Conclusion

Morality, in general, is based upon a dialectical consciousness – a consciousness that necessarily presumes the distinction between 'self' and 'other'. The argument for sustaining such position is that every action is performed unto someone else, and based upon the same argument the idea of reciprocity is constructed and nurtured. This position strengthens the necessity of the *other* for morality (Rao, 2012: 206). The ordinary understanding of *karma* theory is also justified on the same grounds. Presuming the dichotomy between 'self' and 'other', which is constructed upon the apparent differences between the enworlded subjectivity, the moral thinkers have built numerous theoretical models for addressing the basic questions like how one should behave unto the other? Assumption of any kind of 'I' and the idea of *self* produce a 'you' – the other. Otherness is an inevitable spin-off of identity. The entire theoretical moral discourse is an arduous attempt for arranging harmonious existence between self and other.

*NDV* does not develop any such theory; rather, it addresses a fundamental problem of the aforesaid dichotomy and systematically argues that the apparent or empirical phenomenon of using self and other for referring to the distinct beings involves a cognitive error. And, it further proceeds for correcting the error by explaining the superimposition, which is not

18 Śaṅkara regards the path of knowledge (*jñānamārga*) as the direct way to liberation. This viewpoint has created various objects that Śaṅkara cannot uphold an ethical discourse in his framework. Since, he denies usefulness of action But in the first sūtra of Brahma Sūtra Bhaṅya, Śaṅkara has clarified that certain moral prerequisites are to be fulfilled in order to follow the *jñāna-mārga*. Way of action, particularly ethical actions (*karmamārga*) and way of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*) are not essentially contradictory, Śaṅkara at the best is arguing that action does not causally produce liberation. It does not mean that he discounts actions altogether.

mere an exercise in the epistemological sense, but it carves out a ground for the essential oneness of beings, which brings about significant attitudinal transformation (Śaṅkaraçārya, 1911: 3-1-10). If one understands the essential unity of all beings (even if one does not realize the *jīva-Brahman* identity in a transcendental sense), one's attitude towards others and all actions unto others will incur significant transformation. It can be argued from the side of the NDV that, despite refraining from theorizing morality, the system creates a significant foundation for moral living in which any normative (deontological or consequentialist) concerns are not the primary issues, but the consciousness that works behind all knowing and doing is what matters. In brief, the norms of action or the consequence of it are of secondary importance; and the attitudinal transformation before all actions is of primary importance.

The *NDV*'s position can also be seen in view of the fact that despite knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, human beings are not prompted to genuinely engage with the right and refrain from the wrong. A right inducement into a virtuous life demands or presupposes a consciousness or a preceding cognition, which in the case of *NDV* is represented by the 'essential unity of self and other. Without this consciousness as a necessary condition of virtuous living, mere knowledge of good and bad does not provide any incentive to human beings for leading a morally commendable life. In ordinary experiences, the said consciousness is instantiated by our expressions of empathy, care, cooperation, love, etc. When one portrays these traits, the essential human unity is portrayed in fact.

Based upon the above discussion, it follows that empirical identity with reference to the 'enworlded subjectivity' is based upon an error. *NDV* argues for a metaphysical basis of oneness - a superseding identity that absorbs all possible otherness. This is a kind of oneness, the absence of which functions as the basis of all discrimination of self and the other, and realization of which brings about attitudinal transformation. Accordingly, a new kind of moral discourse becomes possible, which calls for attitudinal transformation and the cultivation of virtues as the foundation for moral living. In ordinary treatments of morality, the 'other' remains distant and unrelated from the self and hence offers no substantial reason as why one should have virtues like empathy, compassion, and love for all beings.

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